3.04 from 133 ratings

Genres

Progressive Electronic, Utopian Virtual

Spoken Word, Ambient, Utopian Virtual, New Age, Plunderphonics, Epic Collage

Descriptors

disturbing, surreal, nihilistic, internet, sampling, avant-garde, sexual, atmospheric, ominous, introspective, dark, progressive, suicide, androgynous vocals, mysterious, hypnotic, futuristic, cold, depressive, dense, abstract, lonely, apocalyptic, quirky, raw, animals, escapism, death, anime and manga, psychedelic, suspenseful, anxious, alienation, existential, vulgar

Review by **47x5**

★½☆☆☆

Still Life: Betamale is a video which has developed some fame/infamy among OPN fans, generally being taglined as a disturbing look into "internet

degeneracy". certainly it has striking and memorable imagery - computer setups alternatingly coated in cluttered filth or stripped-back to unnervingly skeletal levels, captured through the lenses of slimy 2000s digital cameras; slow videos of people in fursuits and anime masks overlaid atop hypnotic pixellated imagery; a climax of disturbing and niche hentai blasted at the viewer at lightning speed, coated in muddy effects. i'll give it some credit - it all matches perfectly with the song, the editing switching between overwhelmingly dense and hypnotically sparse, feeling properly like the ominous yet inviting rabbit hole of infinite everything **Still Life** (the song) portrays and conjuring its own distinct atmosphere on top. the clip of a fursuited figure sinking into quicksand is a genuinely striking visual metaphor, and the first minute or so of technology and decay is a brilliant hook! the song itself is absolutely excellent, too! this is, theoretically, good.

my problem is that there are a couple of deep, fundamental flaws keeping **Betamale** from being anything of true relevance beyond its topic and shock. see, here's **Betamale**'s little secret it doesn't want you to know - its priorities are fucking idiotic. there's some shock value if you've never heard of a furry before, but if i'm being real it's pretty limpdicked because none of what it shows *matters*, the way it thinks it does. past its collection of gross or "cursed" computer setups (and only some of those could really be argued to support its idea of harmful, 'degrading' internet addiction, frankly) i just have to wonder why i should care about what it presents. the furry stuff is especially obvious in that regard because it's just so stupid - there's really no way to justify using a horny fursuiter's old video as "deep commentary" because it comments on goddamn nothing, deeply or otherwise. it's a dressed-up disgust reaction and nothing more. even the climax, which people often point to as "the fucked up part" (or even "the problematic part"), is just a days-old flat soda thinking it's goddamn battery acid. it'd be one thing if the guro and such were meant as a kind of representation of the *real* fucked-up parts of the internet, the stuff that's taken down or hidden from sight, but with the way everything's framed and presented it genuinely does just feel like Jon Rafman browsed rule34 once and thought it was humanity's most depraved pit. it's just kind of tragic how the video starts off so strong and then goes "and you know what's especially messed up? SEX!" and never pivots off of that.

look, i've spent a lot of time around people with weird inclinations, and from years of experience knowing the exact people **Betamale** is 'about' i can say definitively that enjoying the many flavors of fucked-up hentai isn't going to make you a potential murderer or what-have-you, or a bad person at all, because it's safely locked away in the unreal. you're certainly not a bad person for liking the tamer hentai or fursuiting or whatever else this video treats as weird and unnerving, either. people can get real bunched up about it but the truth is, no weird fetish is inherently horrifying or harmful or whatever. the only thing 'degenerating' here is repressive social norms! sex

is and always has been and always will be weird, and in these cases especially it often acts as a conduit for something greater. there's something intensely human about what drives that content - the desire to be or view something untethered from physical humanity, to give up or gain control in a safe environment, even to understand your worst memories in a controlled or abstracted way - but something like **Betamale** has no empathy and flattens these things out, presenting them as "distortions" of "normal" humanity or sexuality akin to spending all your time on the computer in a trash pile.

the original review stopped there, but i actually would like to elaborate on this point a bit - i skimmed a bit past that assertation that Weird Porn tm is ultimately harmless, and i wanna justify it a bit more. (this is a tiny bit long and tangential so i ended up spoilering it ->) spoiler: click to read! when it comes down to it, by centering its most 'shocking' moments around this type of stuff, **Betamale** falls into the common trap of overthinking niche sexuality based unconsciously on how stigmatized sexuality as a whole often is, and is pretty shallow as a result. like, it thinks there's a lot of punch to what it's putting down, and there really just isn't.

as an aside, while i don't think that this video is like, *directly* bigoted or meanspirited, i don't think that that's an *entirely* unfair claim. when you boil it down, bigotry is ultimately the irrational hatred for something harmless because of how it clashes with internalized social norms - so, for example, disliking trans people who express gender in unconventional ways. usually there are arguments given for why the bigotry is justified *this* time - maybe that nonbinary people are just 'trenders' jumping on the 'trans bandwagon', in this case - but crucially, these are always pretty thin and flimsy arguments. i hesitate to call anti-furry sentiments or anti-kink sentiments or whatever "bigotry", since it's not like anybody's ACTUALLY ever been arrested or seriously societally oppressed exclusively for being a furry or kinkster, but these sorts of more minor prejudices certainly share a lot of the same dna and language as genuine bigotry, and they can often coincide. accusations of sexual degeneracy are often used as a way to make queerphobia seem justified, after all. i don't think that this video is like, evil propaganda, but i think it's certainly very much worth questioning what *exactly* it's getting at when it flashes ultimately harmless but on-the-surface disturbing content at the viewer in a way which deliberately overwhelms your senses and logical thought, and i do think it's a relevant question to ask when so much of the video's imagery centers around niche sexuality.

to do the thing you're supposed to do in essays and address counterarguments like some kind of CHUMP, i've also seen the argument that **Betamale** is just *being real* - it's a depiction of a certain kind of online life, and that's all there is to it. this strikes me as somewhat obtuse - you can't possibly listen to the dramatic, melancholic swell of the music as the

video flashes porn at you, watch the way the video clearly tries to disturb you with its presentation (such as the Naked Rabbit Girls Getting Hanged Jumpscare at around 1:46), look at the grimy photographs of moldy keyboards and such it inundates you with, and not read some level of judgement into it. **Betamale** has a reputation of being "disturbing" for a reason, and it's not because of the lovingly empathetic and nuanced way it treats what it talks about. i'm willing to entertain the video having some level of sympathy for the archetypical 4channy 'internet degenerate' it scrutinizes, in a very pitying and misguided sense, but i'm not willing to buy that it lends any sympathy to - say - someone who genuinely is just a furry or weeb or whatever with the "wrong" niche kinks. that's a pretty important thing to point out and dissect when, again, so much of the video (or at least *what sticks with people about* the video) centers around these niche kinks! i also think that this reading itself rings rather hollow in the first place, frankly!

see, i've buried the lede here a bit. beyond the specifics of what fetishes or subcultures **Betamale** gawks at, the problem is that it's gawking at all. again, i'm sure its creator and some fans have pretentions of neutrality, of simply portraying things how they are - it's for a song called "Still Life", after all - but this is just untrue. for all its faults **Betamale** is an admirably expressive work, and what it expresses here in my view is not neutrality but a wholly unempathetic disgust. way earlier i put 'about' in quotes, and this is because the video is not *about* anything it depicts - it is about its own disgust towards the depicted. through this video's slimy lens, fursuits and anime merch and odd porn alike are all steps down a horrifying rabbit hole, a road which inevitably ends with... well, you saw those photos at the start, right? through its eyes the people who made these things are not human and utterly anonymized, and their works exist only to drag you into further depravity. i want to circle back to that first minute and ask *how* those photos were taken, a question most don't bother to ask or even ponder. some of these photos are frankly just the result of poverty, people not having proper homes or furniture beyond a computer or tv - let's agree that using these for shock is a bit gross and move on. how do those hoarder setups exist, the desks buried in trash? it's the internet, right? just the endless call of information stealing people from reality. right??

look. there are fucked up things about the internet, ok? absolutely. people exaggerate its addictiveness compared to tv, but screen-based stuff still hotwires our brains and the fact that the internet's flow of endless info is fully controllable makes it extra potent. granted. but *why* do people choose to immerse in it? you're talking about *human beings*, not just weird old pictures of computer setups, and humans have internal lives. the computer alone does not drive someone to the kind of trash-hoarding on display - i (and you, maybe) am almost always online, but i still throw away my trash! this kind of thing, everything in this video really, is driven by external forces with the internet simply acting as a conduit. someone lets their life devolve

because of the compulsive desire to hoard or because they're so intensely depressed that they no longer care in the slightest about their surroundings, but because the photo has a computer in the middle you focus exclusively on that.

i'm sorry to say, but even when reading this video as an analysis of ""4chan degenerates"" and internet addiction - thus sidestepping the issues of whether or not the weird porn in the video is eeevil or not - it's just a shitty analysis. this video doesn't care about any of the actual motivations for spending your time online, in skeevy places or otherwise, it just cares about the onlineness itself. it's a decontextualized view of what it covers, and despite its stylistic flair it largely fails to make any meaningful point beyond a shallow initial emotional reaction. it's just empty. i want to like this video, it's eyecatching and i've spent time in the grody online spaces it takes from, but i just can't, because it doesn't feel like it actually comes from a place of empathy. it's curious about its subjects, it picks at the nebulous concept of "4chan" with a little stick like a new type of insect, but it doesn't have a deep understanding of its subject - it treats it as something on a plane below it, a novel curiosity. perhaps if i was in a very specific place at a very specific time i would feel more connection with it, but i kinda doubt it.

part of the reason why **Betamale**'s lack of empathy is so important is because it means that it, a piece of art about the internet, has no idea what drives its subject. it came out in 2013, and while the polished gentrified internet we live in now had certainly taken hold by then, what came before was still in memory and really was what drove this thing's creation. i want to ask again why people immerse themselves in the internet. for me, it's because it's a portal from a world where i have no place to one where i do. the original internet, the rough and sometimes gross bits which still persist today, were driven by people like me - neurodivergent people, gay and trans people, people in subcultures uncommon enough to rarely meet face-to-face. what **Betamale** reminds me a lot of is the story around CWC, and the way people treat it with "morbid curiosity" (as if she's a piece of roadkill!). let's put aside some genuinely awful recent developments there, since it's not like something which happened just a year or so ago was the inciting incident for something that's been ongoing for over a decade, and take an honest look at what happened there. someone too autistic to fully function in "the real world" made a furry comic that was 'too weird' and was subjected to one of the most intense bullying campaigns ever performed, leading to the decay of an already inherently fraught life and a putting of that life on full display, like a dead butterfly pinned to a board. the internet was the conduit for all this, but the message is universal - if you get too weird, you will be treated with disgust and beaten down. when you try to hide, your spaces will be invaded and either folded into normalcy or labeled as filth. after this, your remains will be paraded around to be gawked at, through the gross lens of an early digital camera or an art project on vimeo.

Still Life: Betamale is not an intelligent look at disturbing online lives. it is a fucking dumbass picking up a rock, taking a weird bug from under it, putting it in a jar, and going up to you like "hey isn't this fucked up?" i'm the bug, and the jar is society. this video sucks ass and R Plus Seven isn't even his best album.

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